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The Rice Is Right

Sake can be as mysterious as the Japanese who brew it. How they drink it using chopsticks, we'll never know. (We just slurp it out of our cupped hand.)

Stuff, 4/13/2004
By Chris Kaye



Shirakawago Sasanigori \$25

Nigori sakes are unfiltered, giving the traditionally clear drink a thick, sweet consistency. It may look like skim milk, but the smoothness tempers the fishiness of Japanese cuisine nicely. If you like piña coladas and getting caught in the rain, mix it with vodka for a modified white Russian. Get mixed up with a Russian mobster for more fun.

Tenzan Jizake \$33

This is the sake version of a good microbrew: It's made in small quantities using only rice, water and *koji* (the mold spores that transform starchy rice into sweet fermented goodness). This formula gives the sake a pure, polished finish. Enjoy it chilled from tiny sake cups with a slice of cucumber and your pinkie held out. (It's manly.)

Niwa no Uguisu Daruma \$47

"The Nightingale of the Garden" is slightly tart and dry. The Zen monk depicted on the bottle prayed for eight years while staring at a blank wall. As a result, he lost the use of his arms and legs. You will, too, after finishing off a bottle. Drink it at room temperature and in small quantities or drop it into a mug of Sapporo beer, boilermaker-style.

Wakatake Daiginjo Onikoroshi \$43

The term *onikoroshi* ("demon killer") used to refer to rice wine so foul it could kill a demon. The term is now used ironically, but at 16 to 17 percent booze, this pricey holy water kicks some serious ass. Mild-mannered and medium dry, this rich sake is sturdy enough to be served warm or cold. Just like revenge!

Napa Valley Hakusan Plum \$7

This fruit-infused sake's syrupy nature makes it nice as a fruit glaze or with dessert—which is kind of girlie for something that looks like Michelob without the head and tastes like a flat wine cooler (in a good way). Place a mug of this in boiling water to warm it up before you drink it. If only NyQuil were this tasty—or cheap.

Bar Review

Paul Tanguay, the beverage director at Sushi Samba in New York, talks sake.

"The *honjozo* variety of sake is great to serve warm, especially on a cold day. The whole idea of hot, though, is a misnomer—it should merely be warm. *Ginjo* and *daiginjo* sakes will lose their flavor and character if served too hot. People frequently request them warm, and I try to explain to them that these need to be cold or room temperature."

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